

## Women and Substance Abuse and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome & Effects

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE also called Fetal Alcohol Related condition FACR) are patterns of birth defects that may develop when expectant mothers drink alcohol during pregnancy. It is not a certainty that an expectant mother who consumes alcohol will have an abnormal pregnancy, nor is it known how much alcohol causes fetal alcohol effects. It is known, however, that consuming any amount of alcohol during pregnancy increases the risk of birth and developmental abnormalities.

**"Frequent Drinking"** Seven or more drinks per week or five or more drinks on one occasion in the past 30 days

Frequent drinking among women of childbearing age is estimated to be 19.4 percent in Wisconsin. "Substance Abuse and Treatment needs Among Pregnant Women in Wisconsin" survey data show that 68 percent of pregnant women surveyed report they stop drinking during pregnancy, but 32 percent do not. There are an estimated 14 to 68 FAS cases each year in Wisconsin. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects cost nearly one billion dollars per year and represent the leading cause of preventable mental retardation in the United States. An important strategy for preventing alcohol-related birth defects is a continuing program of education, technical assistance, community supports and the development of better screening techniques to identify women at high risk for alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Currently, three measures exist, namely self-reported alcohol use by the mother recorded on the birth certificate, FAS hospital discharges, and AODA treatment admissions among pregnant women.

- The Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS) in the Division of Supportive Living has developed, coordinated and delivered training to multidisciplinary professionals in areas such as child development, incest, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and parenting skills. Collaboration with the Division of Public Health has been a significant component of this effort.
- BSAS provides federal funds for the Family Empowerment Network (FEN) in cooperation with UW Department of Family Medicine. FEN is a national resource, referral, and research program serving families affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and related conditions. The contact information for FEN is (800) 462-5254(V), (608) 262-6590(V), FAX: (608) 263-5813. Their web site is [www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/hhi/fen](http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/hhi/fen). (In the near future, the web site will be changing to [www.fammed.wisc.edu/fen](http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/fen).) The FEN mailing address is UW Family Medicine/FEN, 777 S. Mills St., Madison, WI 53715
- BSAS staff provide leadership, technical assistance, and oversight for state and federally funded research and programming for women, pregnant women and women and children with substance abuse issues.
- BSAS produced a report in 1998 titled, "Substance Abuse Treatment needs Among Pregnant Women in Wisconsin." More information is available on the BSAS web site at <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/substabuse>
- In cooperation with other DHFS agencies, which include the Wisconsin Women's Education Network (WWEN), a BSAS federally-funded project, and the Family Empowerment Network (FEN), a project of the University of Wisconsin, initiatives have been funded and supported that include the following: (1) Development of community resources. (2) Education of the general public to remove barriers such as stigma against women who abuse alcohol and drugs.

The Bureau of Substance Abuse Services will continue to improve the availability of programs and services for children such as supervision of children while their mother is in substance abuse treatment.